Dark Hollow

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SYNOPSIS.

A curious crowd of neighbors invade the mysterious home of Judge Ostrander, county judge and eccentric recluse, following a veiled woman who proves to be the widow of a man tried before the judge and electrocuted for murder years before. Her daughter is engaged to the judge's son, from whom he is estranged, but the murder is between the lovers. She plans to clear her husband's memory and asks the judge's aid. Deborah Scoville reads the newspaper clippings telling the story of the murder of Algernon Etheridge by John Scoville in Dark Hollow, twelve years before. The judge and Mrs. Scoville meet at Spencer's Folly and she shows him how, on the day of the murder, she saw the shadow of a man, whittling a stick and wearing a long peaked cap. The judge engages her and her daughter Reuther to live with him in his mysterious home. Deborah and her lawyer, Black, go to the police station and see the stick used to murder Etheridge. She discovers a broken knife-blade point embedded in it. Deborah and Reuther go to live with the judge. Deborah sees a portrait of Oliver, the judge's son, with a black band painted across the eyes. That night she finds, in Oliver's room, a cap with a peak like the shadowed one, and a knife with a broken blade-point. Anonymous letters and a talk with Miss Weeks increase her suspicions and fears. She finds that Oliver was in the ravine on the murder night. Black warns her and shows her other anonymous letters hinting at Oliver's guilt. In the court room the judge is handed an anonymous note. The note is picked up and read aloud.

CHAPTER XII—Continued.

As for Deborah, she had shrunk out of sight at his approach, but as soon as he had ridden off she looked eagerly for a taxicab to carry her in his wake. She could not let him ride that mile alone. She was still fearful for him, though the mass of people about her was rapidly dissolving away, and the streets growing clear.

She can see his carriage now. Held up for a moment by the crowd, it has broken through, and is rolling quickly towards Ostrander lane. But the mob is following, and she is yet far behind.

Shouting to the the chauffeur to hasten, the insistent honk! hank! of the cab adds it raucous note to the turmoil! They have dashed through one group—they are dashing through another—naught can withstand an onrushing automobile. She catches glimpses of raised arms threatening retaliation; of eager, stolid, uncertain and furious faces—and her breath held back during that one instant of wild passage rushes pantingly forth again. Ostrander lane is within sight. If only they can reach it—if only they can cross it! But they cannot without sowing death in their track. No scattered groups here, the mob fills the corner. It is packed close as a wall. Brought up against it, the motor necessarily comes to a standstill.

She will have to wait until the crowd sways apart, allowing her to—Ah, there, some heads are moving now! She catches one glimpse ahead of her, and see—What does she see? The noble but shrunk figure of the judge drawn up before his gate. His lips are moving, but no sound issues from them; a change passes like a stroke of lightning over the surging mass. Some one shouts out "Coward!" another, "Traitor!" and the lifted head falls, the moving lips cease from their efforts and in place of the great personality which filled their eyes a moment before, they see a man entrapped, waking to the horror of a sudden death in life for which no visions of the day, no dreams of the night, had been able to prepare him.

It was a sight to waken pity, not derision. But these people had gathered here in a bitter mood and their rancor had but scented the prey. Calls of "Oliver!" and such threats as "You saved him at a poor man's expense, but we'll have him yet, we'll have him yet!" began to rise about him; followed by endless repetitions of the name from near and far: "Oliver! Oliver!"

Oliver! His own lips seemed to re-echo the word. Then like a lion baited beyond his patience the judge lifted his head and faced them all with a fiery intensity which for the moment made him a terrible figure to contemplate.

"Let no one utter that name to me here!" shot from his lips in tones of unspeakable menace and power. "Spare me that name, or the curse of my ruined life be upon you. I can bear no more today."

The cry arose again: "Oliver! Oliver! The sons of the rich go free, but ours have to hang!"

At which he gave them one stare and fell back against the door. It yielded and a woman's arms received him. The gentle Reuther in that hour of dire extremity, showed herself stronger than her mother who had fallen in a faint amid the crowd.

To one who swoons but seldom, the moment of returning consciousness is often fraught with great pain and sometimes with unimaginable horror. It was such to Deborah; the pain and horror holding her till her eyes, accustomed to realities again, saw in the angel face which floated before her vision amid a swarm of demon masks, the sweet and solicitous countenance of Reuther.

Reuther, taking her mother's hand in hers, said softly:

"I knew you were not seriously ill, only frightened by the crowd and their senseless shoutings. Don't think of it any more, dear mother. The people are dispersing now, and you will soon be quite restored and ready to smile with us at an attack so groundless it is little short of absurd."

Astonished at such tranquillity where she had expected anguish if not stark unreason, doubting her eyes, her ears—for this was no longer her delicate, suffering Reuther to be shielded from all unhappy knowledge, but a woman as strong if not as wise to the situation as herself—she scrutinized the child closely, then turned her gaze slowly about the room, and started in painful surprise, as she perceived standing in the space behind her the tall figure of Judge Ostrander.

"Pardon," she entreated, forgetting Reuther's presence in her consciousness of the misery she had brought upon her benefactor. "I never meant—I never dreamed—"

"Oh, no apologies!" Was this the judge speaking? The tone was an admonitory, not a suffering one. It was not even that of a man humiliated or distressed. "You have had a unfortunate experience, but that is over now and so must your distress be." Then, as in her astonishment she dropped her hands and looked up, he added very quietly, "Your daughter has been much disturbed about you, but not at all about Oliver or his good name. She knows my son too well, and so do you and I, to be long affected by the virulent outcries of a mob seeking for an object upon which to expend their spleen."

Deborah was glad to sit silent under this open rebuke and listen to Reuther's ingenuous declarations, though she knew that they brought no conviction and distilled no real comfort either to his mind or hers.

"Yes, mother, darling," the young girl was saying. "These people have not seen Oliver in years, but we have, and nothing they can say, nothing that any one can say but himself, could ever shake my belief in him as a man incapable of a really wicked act. He might be capable of striking a sudden blow—most men are under great provocation—but to conceal such a fact—to live for years enjoying the respect of all who knew him, with the knowledge festering in his heart of another having suffered for his crime—that, that would be impossible to Oliver Ostrander."

Some words ring in the heart long after their echo has left the ear. Impossible! Deborah stole a look at the judge. But he was gazing at Reuther, where he well might gaze, if his sinking heart craved support or his abashed mind sought to lose itself in the enthusiasm of this pure soul, with its loving, uncalculating instincts.

"Tell the judge who is as confident of Oliver as I am myself that you are confident, too. That you could no more believe him capable of this abominable act than you could believe it of my father."

"I will—tell—the judge," stammered the unhappy mother. "Judge," she briefly declared, as she rose with the help of her daughter's arm, "my mind agrees with yours in this matter. What you think, I think." And that was all she could say.

As she fell again into her seat, the judge turned to Reuther:

"Leave your mother for a little while," he urged, with that rare gentleness he always showed her. "Let her rest here a few minutes longer, alone with me."

"Yes, Reuther," murmured Deborah, seeing no way of avoiding this inevitable interview. "I am feeling better every minute. I will come soon."

The young girl's eye faltered from one to the other, then settled, with a strange and imploring look upon her mother. Had her clear intelligence pierced at last to the core of that mother's misery? Had she seen what Deborah would have spared her at the cost of her own life? It would seem so, for when the mother, with great effort, began some conciliatory speech, the young girl smiled with a certain sad patience, and, turning toward Judge Ostrander, said as she softly withdrew:

"You have been very kind to allow me to mention a name and discuss a subject you have expressly forbidden. I want to show my gratitude, Judge Ostrander, by never referring to it again without your permission. That you know my mind"—here her head rose with a sort of lofty pride which lent a dazzling quality to her usually quiet beauty—"and that I know yours, is quite enough for me."

"A noble girl! a mate for the best!" fell from the judge's lips after a silence disturbed only by the faint, far-off murmur of a slowly dispersing throng.

Deborah made no answer. She could not yet trust her courage or her voice.

The judge, who was standing near, concentrated his look upon her features. "Madam!"—he was searching her eyes, searching her very soul, as men seldom search the mind of another. "You believe in the truth of these calumnies that have just been shouted in our ears. You believe what they say of Oliver. You, with every prejudice in his favor; with every desire to recognize his worth! You, who have shown yourself ready to drop your husband's cause though you consider it an honest one, when you saw what havoc it would entail to my boy's repute. You believe—and on what evidence?" he broke in. "Because of the picture and the coincidence of his presence in the ravine?"

"Yes."

"But these are puerile reasons." He was speaking peremptorily now and with all the weight of a master mind. "And you are not the woman to be satisfied with anything puerile. There is something back of all this; something you have not imparted. What is that something? Tell—tell—"

"Oliver was a mere boy in those days and a very passionate one. He

Deborah Made No Answer. She Could Not Yet Trust Her Voice.

hated Etheridge—the obtrusive mentor who came between him and yourself."

"Hated?"

"Yes, there is proof."

He did not ask where. Possibly he knew. And because he did not ask she did not tell him, holding on to her secret in a vague hope that so much at least might never see light.

"I knew the boy shrank sometimes from Algernon's company," the judge admitted, after another glance at her face; "but that means nothing in a boy full of his own affairs. What else have you against him? Speak up! I can bear it all."

"He handled the stick that—that—"

"Never! Now you have gone mad, madam."

"I would be willing to end my days in an asylum if that would disprove this fact."

"But, madam, what proof—what reason can you have for an assertion so monstrous?"

"You remember the shadow I saw which was not that of John Scoville? The person who made that shadow was whittling a stick; that was a trick of Oliver's. I have heard that he even whittled furniture."

"Good God!" The judge's panoply was pierced at last.

"They tried to prove, as you will remember, that it was John who thus disfigured the bludgeon he always carried with pride. But the argument was a sorry one and in itself would have broken down the prosecution had he been a man of better repute. Now, those few chips taken from the handle of this weapon will carry a different significance. For in my folly I asked to see this stick, which still exists at police headquarters, and there in the wood I detected and pointed out a trifle of steel which never came from the unbroken blades of the knife taken from John's pocket."

Fallen was the proud head now and fallen the great man's aspect. If he spoke it was to utter a low "Oliver! Oliver!"

The pathos of it—the heart-rending wonder in the tone brought the tears to Deborah's eyes and made her last words very difficult.

"But the one great thing which gives to these facts their really dangerous point is the mystery you have made of your life and of this so-called hermitage. If you can clear up that, you can afford to ignore the rest."

"The misfortunes of my house!" was his sole response. "The misfortunes of my house!"

CHAPTER XIII.

One Secret Less.

Suddenly he faced Deborah again. The crisis of feeling had passed, and he looked almost cold.

"You have had advisers," said he. "Who are they?"

"I have talked with Mr. Black."

The judge's brows met.

"Well, you were wise," said he. Then, shortly, "What is his attitude?"

Feeling that her position was fast becoming intolerable, she falteringly replied, "Friendly to you and Oliver, but, even without all the reasons which move me, sharing my convictions."

"He has told you so?"

"Not directly; but there was no misjudging his opinion of the necessity you were under to explain the mysteries of your life. And it was yesterday we talked; not today."

Like words thrown into a void, these slow, lingering, half-uttered phrases seemed to awaken an echo which rung not only in his inmost being, but in hers. Not till in both natures silence had settled again (the silence of despair, not peace), did he speak. When he did it was simply to breathe her name.

"Deborah?"

Startled, for it had always before been "madam," she looked up to find him standing very near her and with his hand held out.

"I am going through deep waters," said he. "Am I to have your support?"

"Oh, Judge Ostrander, how can you doubt it?" she cried, dropping her hand into his, and her eyes swimming with tears. "But what can I do? If I remain here I will be questioned. If I fly—but, possibly, that is what you want—for me to go—to disappear—to take Reuther and sink out of all men's sight forever. If this is your wish, I am ready to do it. Gladly will we be gone—now—at once—this very night.

His disclaimer was peremptory.

"No; not that. I ask no such sacrifice. Neither would it avail. There is but one thing which can reinstate Oliver and myself in the confidence and regard of these people. Cannot you guess it, madam? I mean your own restored conviction that the sentence passed upon John Scoville was a just one. Once satisfied of this, your temperament is such that you would be our advocate whether you wished it or no. Your very silence would be eloquent."

"Convince me; I am willing to have you, Judge Ostrander. But how can you do so? A shadow stands between my wishes and the belief you mention. The shadow cast by Oliver as he made his way towards the bridge, with my husband's bludgeon in his hand."

"Did you see him strike the blow? Were there any opportune shadows to betray what happened between the instant of—let us say Oliver's approach and the fall of my friend? Much can happen in a minute, and this matter is one of minutes. Scoville had a heart open to crime, Oliver not. This I knew when I sat upon the bench at his trial; and now you shall know it, too. Come! I have something to show you."

He turned towards the door and mechanically she followed. Her thoughts were all in a whirl. She did not know what to make of him or of herself. The rooted dread of weeks was stirring in its soil. This suggestion of the transference of the stick from hand to hand was not impossible. Only Scoville had sworn to her, and that, too, upon their child's head, that he had not struck this blow. And she had believed him after finding the cap; and she believed him now. Yes, against her will, she believed him now. Why? and again, why?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Destroying the Mosquito.

The way to destroy the mosquito in its larval stage is to pour a little kerosene on the surface of the pool or stream inhabited by the industrious wiggler. The oil shuts out the supply of oxygen from the water beneath. The wiggler rises tail first to the surface and tries to force his breathing tube through the thin layer of oil. He fails and promptly dies from suffocation—a suitable death for so fratricidal an insect.

TECHNICALITIES OF THE INDICTMENT.

The average man will never realize what an extremely technical paper the indictment is, and how the rules in it must be observed against all common sense. It is one of these rules that the venue—the place where the crime is said to have been committed—must be stated in the indictment and must be proven at the trial. In Campbell county, Virginia, a prisoner named Anderson was put on trial for murder. The evidence showed that the murder took place at Anderson's store, about one-quarter of a mile from Lynches Station. The indictment did not say the murder was committed at Lynches Station and that Lynches Station was in Campbell county. It was so well known to everybody that Lynches Station was in Campbell county that it never occurred to anyone formally to introduce evidence in proof of that fact. Nevertheless this was a violation of the rules, and the supreme court reversed the verdict, holding that it would not take judicial notice that Lynches Station was in Campbell county, and sent the case back for a new trial.—Melville Davisson Post in the Saturday Evening Post.

MANLIKE TEETH OF ANCIENT APE.

Prof. A. G. Thacher, an eminent British geologist, in an article in Science Progress, mentions the recent discovery of the jaw of an ape which has teeth more closely resembling human teeth than do those of the chimpanzee and orang-utan, man's nearest relatives in the animal world.

In these animals, and in all of the living species of the ape, the cuspids are much larger and longer than in man. But in this ancient ape, which lived, according to geologists, hundreds of thousands of years ago, the cuspids were small, like those of man. This is regarded as an indication that the development of the cuspid teeth of apes resulted from the necessity for their use in tearing off husks of nuts and for like purposes.

Thick Headed.

Yeast—Doctor Pearl, the noted poultry authority of Maine, says that a hen's egg is similar to the human skull with regard to variations in size and shape.

Crimsonbeak—But the similarity ends right there. The average human skull is so much thicker.—Yonkers Statesman.

Pathetic.

"Don't you think it is extravagant to think of giving that record egg laying hen a diamond engagement ring as they did in Philadelphia?"

"I think it an outrage when so many other 'chickens' have to do without diamond ones."

When it comes to drawing conclusions all women are natural born artists.

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